

**Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, June 26, 1806,
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Leicester Ford.**

TO THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY J. MSS. (ALBERT GALLATIN.)

June 26, 1806.

The Attorney-General being absent, we must decide for ourselves the question raised by Colonel Newton's letter, whether Mr. Cooper can own a registered vessel? or, in other words, whether he is a citizen of the United States?

I hold the right of expatriation to be inherent in every man by the laws of nature, and incapable of being rightfully taken from him even by the united will of every other person in the nation. If the laws have provided no particular mode by which the right of expatriation may be exercised, the individual may do it by any effectual and unequivocal act or declaration. The laws of Virginia have provided a mode; Mr. Cooper is said to have exercised his right solemnly and exactly according to that mode, and to have departed from the Commonwealth; whereupon the law declares that "he shall thenceforth be deemed no citizen." Returning afterwards he returns an alien, and must proceed to make himself a citizen if he desires it, as every other alien does. At present he can hold no lands, receive nor transmit any inheritance, nor enjoy any other right peculiar to a citizen.

The general government has nothing to do with this question. Congress may by the Constitution "establish an uniform rule of naturalization," that is, by what rule an alien may

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become a citizen. But they cannot take from a citizen his natural right of divesting himself of the character of a citizen by expatriation.